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A Gay Aerospace Worker Sues the CIA

John Green, a 50-year-old supervisor on a highly classified project, was sure they knew. The government, he told friends, knew practically everything about the lives of workers handling secrets. So in 1981, during a routine security check on his roommate—also an employee of defense contractor TRW—Green volunteered what he thought was a self-evident personal detail: his homosexuality. Three weeks later the Central Intelligence Agency ordered the 13-year aerospace engineer's security clearance suspended. Demotion followed. Green is now suing the CIA, and the case is shaping up as a sharp test of the agency's antigay policies.

Government agencies handling classified information have traditionally justified discrimination against homosexuals by arguing that enemy agents could blackmail gays by threatening to expose their private lives. But such policies rest on the assumption that the worker in question fears public disclosure of his sexual preference. In recent years the Defense Department, the National Security Agency and other agencies have relaxed their antigay positions in cases where employees are out of the closet.

Today the CIA is the only part of the government that flatly refuses to hire gays. Its guideline, entitled "Policy on Certain Sexual Conduct," suggests homosexuality is a "personality disorder." Gay activists are

determined to fight the policy and say Green's suit is only the first of many to come. Meanwhile, TRW may have encountered more-than-usual scrutiny from the CIA for other reasons. Green worked for the same TRW plant that in 1977 figured in the highly publicized "Falcon and Snowman" espionage case, in which a company employee passed secrets to the Soviets.

Hidden? The CIA defense against Green's suit will probably rest on an accusation by CIA Director of Security William R. Kotapish that Green hid his homosexuality. But the agency may have trouble proving that in court. Three months before the decisive background check on Green's roommate, Green had reported his membership in the largest gay ski club in Los Angeles. And interviews with Green's co-workers at TRW suggest that the information the CIA says it "developed" in 1981 had in fact been common knowledge at TRW for years. Harry Schmeichel, a staff engineer, says Green told him about his homosexuality in 1967, only months after arriving at TRW. "He didn't go around telling everyone, 'I'm gay,'" Schmeichel says. "But he made no effort to hide it." According to Green, security officers simply never bothered to ask.

Green describes himself as a conservative Republican. "I approve of Mr. Reagan very much," he says. "But I feel I'm the victim of the old guard embedded in the bureaucracy—people with homophobic values." If the agency's real goal is to reduce the possibility of blackmail, he adds, it's going about it in exactly the wrong way. His gay friends are "going to be very closeted now. They know if I'd taken the path of getting myself a lesbian girlfriend and giving the impression that I'm a real stud, I'd still have my security clearances."

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